

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Launching Products Globally Through Lean, Agile Teams With A Digital-First Model Mindset

10-MIN SUMMARY



ASEEM PURI

Chief Marketing Officer, Unilever International

When Aseem Puri joined Unilever, his challenge was to build brands globally, with limited resources and a very small team. How would he understand consumers, identify what brands to launch, and support launches in different countries, with a team of 2 or 3 people? How would he meet the company's ambition of launching over 100 brands globally in around 100 countries?

His solution was a digital-first model. This approach has enabled the fast rollout of many brands in numerous markets, using a lean, agile team. Technology has been used to scale fast, learn quickly, understand consumers, test, and launch successfully.

He is a firm believer in digital experimentation and testing to understand consumers. This has resulted in the launch of the right brands and growth in market share and market-leading products.

He demonstrates the value of digital transformation with an example of a skincare brand Unilever wanted to launch in SE Asia. They did not know what product would be most likely to work, but the consumers would provide the answer. Aseem team mocked up the products and used just a \$100 investment in A/B testing on

social media for a few days to see which received more engagement. The results suggested a face scrub brand that did not exist in SE Asia would be popular, despite the company saying it would not succeed, as it was an expensive, premium, and medical brand. The product was launched, and consumers loved it.

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Live testing validated the target consumer and awareness was reinforced digitally, using social, paid, influencer, and search marketing. Puri explains that 4 years ago the brand was worth a few thousand dollars; now it is worth multimillions. Moreover, it is the segment leader, and a portfolio assortment has been launched based on the success of the first product. This penetration was achieved by a few people using technology and external capability to test, learn, validate, and drive media.

Aseem says when deciding what product to launch, the first step is social listening, using

cheap or free engines. This provides data on brands and trends by category. Next, brand concepts are developed and A/B tested on social media. Online research panels are used for validation.

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His team works with an agency that buys global media for them on all digital platforms. A particular profession, audience, or demographic can be targeted using search and social. Media are used in a targeted way to influence customers, drive traffic toward eCommerce or conversion, to a direct-to-consumer website or, in the case of B2B, for lead generation.

Aseem asserts that, as people are spending most of their time online today, digital is the only way to reach them: "As a result, we are a 100% digital model. We don't spend money on anything else. It is already the best ROI, and the most effective."

He shares an important message to people in marketing, "Don't depend on others to do it for you. Do it yourself... Forget the technology and platforms – it is all in the experimentation, the culture of experimenting. Testing and learning are the key. Turn it into a hypothesis and test it. Data will give you the answer," he continues. He

tells his creative agencies to develop ideas, from disruptive to standard, then work with the media partner and test them. He spends 3–5% of the budget on testing, optimizing, and A/B testing to validate what message is working. Content presentation is important when consumers are making split-second decisions on screens; color, form, and image all impact consumer engagement and must be tested.

Aseem uses an art analogy to compare the traditional and digital approaches; "traditional agencies paint Picassos, but today's digital consumers want Dilbert – they demand new content every 15 minutes." Digitally native consumers don't expect perfection; they are more interested in the quality of content, education, or entertainment. This necessitates a content production engine that can produce a large volume at a reasonably low cost, which can be adapted based on testing. "We use a combination of smaller digital agencies, by cluster, or market, or globally, and ask them to produce 100 quick and cheap pieces of content around a product or theme, using animation or technology. Then we test it to see what is working. We also use the open talent economy on Upwork or Fiverr. Half of our content comes from them."

Today, consumers trust other consumers, reviews, independent third parties, and content from neutral and trustworthy sites. Brands need to build trust and provide quality educational information. They need a brand purpose that goes beyond selling products and serves customers' needs. Patterns of online behavior can be uncovered by asking people what they do online, what sites they visit for information, entertainment, and to shop for a particular category. These

insights inform the content strategy and help decisions about whether to develop something entertaining, short videos, a Q&A series, or a product efficacy demonstration.

OTC brands can use these techniques, but the more regulated areas of pharma can think about repurposing approved content in digital forms, or using patients or influencers to talk about the product. Online panel studies and consumer surveys can measure the impact.

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Aseem recommends regular social listening to show the good and the bad being said about the company, the competition, and the product category.

Beyond the standard business measures of turnover, P&L, and market share, Puri's top priorities are to focus on brand awareness and penetration. He is less concerned about national market share and more interested in segment share. He states, "Marketing equals maths. It is less about brilliant creative, more about precision and targeting and focus."

Marketing in this agile way is, he reports, on average, 90% cheaper than the conventional model. Whether in B2B or B2C, a brand that serves customer needs will generate trust and uptake.

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